

OLC 71-0901

26 August 1971

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT: Conversations with John Goldsmith, of the Senate Armed Services Committee Staff, re Possible Secret Senate Debate on Laos -- 23, 24 August 1971

1. In discussing the above subject on 23 August 1971, Mr. Goldsmith made the following points:

a. The original "Symington amendment" imposing a \$200 million limit on expenditures in Laos for FY 72 was not offered in Committee. What was offered was a provision that would have made it impossible for us to fund the [redacted] but this was voted down.

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b. In view of this there is no telling what kind of new restrictions on our Laos operations may be introduced on the floor when the Senate reconvenes.

c. In the event of a secret session to discuss Laos, Senator Stennis should be prepared for all kinds of questions, including questions about sensitive Agency operations, the Agency budget, etc. In response to such questions, the Senator plans to say that he will discuss them with individual members but does not consider them appropriate for general discussion.

2. Mr. Goldsmith speculated that the following questions might arise in a secret session:

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[redacted]

b. In the event of death or injury, what benefits are they entitled to and from whom?

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4. Mr. Goldsmith and I further pursued the same subject at lunch on 24 August during which I explained the Agency's reluctance to get "out front" in defending their Laos operations against congressional critics. I said it seemed to me this was a question of national policy on which our top policy makers should speak for the Administration. Mr. Goldsmith agreed, and among the possibilities we discussed, without being sure of their feasibility, was a letter from the President, either to Senator Stennis or to the Senate leadership, which might be used in Senate debate on the subject and could include the following points:

a. The history of our Laotian involvement, particularly including an explanation of why the Geneva Convention necessitated action of a covert or nonattributable nature.

b. The related requirement for elaborate steps to protect friendly cooperating governments, who were also party to the Geneva Convention, from embarrassment.

c. The effectiveness of our Laotian operations in tying down a substantial North Vietnamese force, preserving the fragile status quo in Laos, and thus limiting Communist options in the overall Indochina situation.

d. The possibility that any change in either the ground rules, or the U.S. commitment, in Laos might foreclose certain

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Presidential options at a critical moment when the U.S.
is engaged simultaneously in major troop withdrawals in
Indochina and in the initial stages of a dialogue with Peking.

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